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A Study of the Growth and Development of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District

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A Study of the Growth and Development of
the Sumrall Special Consolidated
School District

Stringer

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A STUDY OF THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
SUMRALL SPECIAL CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

A THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The School of Education

By
Roscoe Odas Stringer
B. A., Mississippi College, 1924
August, 1940

FOREWORD

The writer of this thesis has served as Superintendent of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School since its formation in 1931. Prior to that he occupied the position of Superintendent of the Sumrall Municipal Separate School District. Therefore, a considerable amount of the information contained herein is drawn from his own knowledge and experience.

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A debt of thanks is due the teachers and pupils of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School for their assistance in this study.

June, 1940

R. O. S.

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Abstract

This thesis presents a study of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, taking into consideration: (1) the social, economic, and educational conditions of the district prior to consolidation; (2) growth and changes during the period of consolidation; and (3) the social, economic, and educational conditions of the district after consolidation. Chronologically, the study sets forth the social and industrial evolution of the district, the educational evolution of the district, the conclusions reached, and recommendations for further educational development in the district.

The author has produced evidence to show that the establishment of a special consolidated high school at Sumrall, Mississippi, was preferable to the maintenance of small schools in the various communities of the district, and that consolidation at Sumrall has resulted in more adequate supervision of the teaching work; better educational results obtained through better division of the pupil's time between recitation and study; the teaching of vitalizing special subjects such as music, sanitation, athletics, commercial work, manual training, agriculture, and household arts; the ad-

dition to the curriculum of more high school subjects; the increase in education, general culture, and breadth of view from contact with the larger number of pupils met in the larger school; a stable teaching force; better teachers obtained for a larger school paying a substantial salary; and a decrease in operating expense with an accompanying reduction in school taxes throughout the district.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this thesis to present a study of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, taking into consideration the following factors: (1) the social, economic, and educational conditions of the district prior to consolidation; (2) growth and changes during the period of consolidation; and (3) the social, economic, and educational conditions of the district after consolidation.

In presenting the results of this study, the author hopes to show that the establishment of a special consolidated school at Sumrall was preferable to the maintenance of small consolidated schools in the various communities of the district, and that consolidation at Sumrall has resulted in more adequate supervision of the teaching work; better educational results obtained through better division of the pupil's time between recitation and study; the teaching of vitalizing special subjects such as music, sanitation, athletics, commercial work, manual training, agriculture, and household arts; the addition to the curriculum of more high school subjects; the increase in education, general culture, and breadth of view from contact with the larger number of pupils met in the larger

school; a stable teaching force, where there is never more than a small per cent of the teachers to leave at one time; better teachers obtained for a larger school paying a substantial salary; and a decrease in operating expense with an accompanying reduction in taxes throughout the district.

Since the colored school of this district is supervised by the county superintendent of education rather than the superintendent of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, this study is limited to the white population and the white schools of the district. The district embraces an area of approximately 180 square miles. It is located in the northwest part of Lamar County, Mississippi, and includes in addition portions of Covington and Marion Counties. It embraces Sumrall, a small town of about 500 white people; Oloh school, ten miles from Sumrall; Hickory Grove school, nine miles from Sumrall; and Rocky Branch school, nine miles from Sumrall. Although the Victory and Clarke schools are not consolidated with Sumrall, high school students from these communities attend the Sumrall school under special arrangements.

The study will present the social and industrial evolution of the Sumrall district, the educational evolution of the Sumrall district, the conclusions reached, and recommendations for further educational development in the Sumrall district.

After the problem had been selected and delimited, interviews were held with the County Superintendent of Education in Lamar County, the Chancery Clerk of Lamar County, the high school principal at Sumrall, and the board of trustees at Sumrall. A study was made of the records of the State Department of Education at Jackson, of those in the office of the County Superintendent of Education at Purvis, in the office of the Chancery Clerk at Purvis, in the office of the District Superintendent of Education at Sumrall, and of the records of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen at Sumrall. Reference books and theses in the library of the Louisiana State University at University, Louisiana, were consulted. A contest was staged among the high school students of Sumrall in which prizes were given for the most complete history of Sumrall and surrounding territory. The research for these histories was done under the direction of Mr. Nat M. Sheets, A. B., A. M., formerly a member of the state editorial staff of the Federal Writer's Project in Georgia and now a member of the high school faculty in Sumrall. City archives, court records, records of the bank, railroad, mercantile establishments, churches, and the high school, newspaper files, and interviews with old settlers were the sources of information used. The factual data were checked and substantiated by

Dr. J. R. Anderson and Mr. R. R. Hudson, two men who have been instrumental in building the town of Sumrall and who know the history of the town and surrounding territory.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL EVOLUTION OF SUMRALL DISTRICT

The history of Sumrall is, to a large extent, the history, in miniature, of that section of Mississippi in which it is located. This section is south of the Jackson Prairie belt and runs to within a few miles of the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. Here the red and yellow sandy loam produced the state's famed long leaf pine belt known simply as the Piney Woods.¹ Until the close of the last century, the section was composed, in the main, of dense forests inhabited principally by deer, turkeys, and other game. A few hardy pioneers had cleared out farms here and there, where they lived under almost pioneer conditions. In 1881 the Southern Railroad pushed northeastward from New Orleans into Mississippi, across Pearl River and into the heart of the almost untouched forest.² Outside capital had penetrated the Piney Woods and lumber mills sprang up throughout the section.

¹Mississippi, A Guide to the Magnolia State, (New York, The Viking Press, 1938), p. 34.

²Ibid, p. 109.

A Pennsylvanian, J. J. Newman, established a mill at Sumrall and with this step the town began. In 1888 Arthur J. Lott had built a grist mill and cotton gin on the creek, later known as Mill Creek, near the spot where Highway Number 24 crosses the mill-pond. A year later Daniel Sumrall purchased Arthur Lott's mill and farm and when, due to Mr. Sumrall's initiative, a Post Office was established for the section, it was named Sumrall.³

In 1902 Daniel Sumrall sold his water rights to the J. J. Newman Lumber Company. A dam was constructed, a pond provided and two large mills erected, Mill Number 2 on the south side of the creek, and Mill Number 3 on the north side. The work for the first few months consisted of setting up the machinery for the mill and the construction of the houses to be occupied by the employees--small houses of four or five rooms, minus bath and other conveniences for the common laborers and larger and more attractively built and arranged houses for those holding more responsible positions in the mill.

A commissary, later sold to private individuals, was opened. Other business houses followed. Doctors and

³ Easterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall," (Unpublished Manuscript, High School Library, Sumrall, Mississippi, 1940).

dentists moved in. A hotel was opened and in 1904 "The Sumrall Bank" was chartered with a capital of \$40,000. In the two mills approximately 700 men were employed in daytime operations, and over 1000 men were employed in day and night operation. The average payroll for one month was \$60,000. The farmers who lived nearby profited, furnishing the people with fresh vegetables, milk, and butter.⁴

Transportation being a necessity, in 1902 a railroad was built to connect Sumrall with Hattiesburg. Prior to this travel had been by the highway which had been surveyed in 1887 to connect Hattiesburg, Forrest County, with Mount Carmel, Jefferson Davis County.⁵ The railroad was a mill line and was known as the "Newman Dummy Line." The train consisted of log trains with passenger coaches attached. The Mississippi Central, constructed a few years later to connect Natchez and Hattiesburg was routed through Sumrall. A station giving the town rail connections with points north and south was erected and a number of railroad employees were added to the town's rapidly growing population.⁶

⁴Ibid.

⁵Personal Interview, R. R. Hudson, Sumrall, Mississippi.

⁶Easterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall," op. cit.

In 1904 the community had a population of 2,000 and was incorporated as a town.⁷ It was a prosperous and lusty town--a typical mill boom town. The mill hands were hard working and hard living men. The sawmills were operating full force. Wages were good. Common laborers received two dollars and a half per day; skilled laborers received from five to ten dollars per day. The hardy piney woodsmen and imported laborers felt impelled to spend their wages as fast as they were earned. Business, legitimate and illegitimate, flourished side by side. Bootlegging was general and liquor and jail fines took their toll of the weekly pay checks. Fighting and killings resulted from intoxication, and many other crimes, due to drunkenness and gambling, were committed. Many white, and a still greater number of colored, people were killed on the streets of Sumrall during this period.⁸

Amusements in the early days of the town consisted of horse races, buggy riding, dancing, church socials, pranks, and horseplay. The livery stable was a prominent feature of the town and here horses for racing, driving, and riding were kept.⁹

⁷ Minutes of the Board of Aldermen, Sumrall, Mississippi, July 5, 1931.

⁸ Easterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall," op. cit.

⁹ Ibid.

The brawlers did not compose the entire population of Sumrall. Many respectable people lived here and worked diligently to maintain their homes. Frowning on drinking, gambling, and racing, they participated in civic activities and church functions. They were the backbone of the community.¹⁰

The first church in Sumrall was organized in 1904 by a Reverend Davis. It was a Baptist church and was known as the West Sumrall Church. Two years later it was moved about two and one half miles from town on the old Military Road and re-named Military Baptist Church.¹¹ Another Baptist church was established almost immediately, and the Methodists established their church soon after; later a Catholic church was organized. At first these churches were housed in frame buildings, but in 1914 the Methodists erected a brick structure, and in 1927 the Baptists followed their example. The Catholic church in Sumrall ceased to function in 1930.¹²

In 1914 one of the sawmills burned. This decreased both the number of employees and the payroll. This naturally affected the economic conditions of the town. In

¹⁰Personal Interview, R. R. Hudson, Sumrall, Mississippi.

¹¹Kasterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall," op. cit.

¹²Ibid.

1915 the employees of the remaining mill struck for higher wages. The strike lasted a week when an agreement was reached whereby the Newman Lumber Company granted the employees a fifteen cent raise.¹³ By 1931 all the available timber in this vicinity had been cut and the remaining mill closed. The main source of the town's economic life had dried up at its source and in common with the rest of the country, the community was in the depth of the general business depression which followed the stock-market crash in 1929.

With the town's chief source of livelihood gone, the community was badly disorganized. Business houses failed, or closed. Many families moved away. Among the first to go was the lawless element. The more substantial remained, determined to wrest a living, directly or indirectly, from the sandy-loam hillsides. Because of their determination, Sumrall did not become just another ghost lumber town of rusting machinery and dilapidated houses in a waste of pine stumps. Now dependent entirely upon agriculture in general and Mississippi's staple crop --cotton--in particular, the economic life of the community reverted to almost pioneer simplicity. A few stores

¹³
Ibid.

remained, or were established to serve the curtailed wants of the community. A bank--a branch of the Lamar County Bank at Purvis--remained, but establishments catering to other than the necessities of life disappeared.

Social life followed the pattern of the economic life and became simplified. The home and the church remained as the pivotal points of social life. Family gatherings, and church and school socials gained the ascendancy. Horses had already yielded to the machine age; so racing had died a natural death. Dancing disappeared, as did gambling. Some drinking continued, to be lessened as death gradually thinned the ranks of the drinkers. In short, the town settled down, not into the drowsiness of old age, but rather into the calm simplicity of one who, having spent his youth riotously, finds himself penniless but not totally without resources as he enters adulthood and so sets about to make the best of what remains.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATIONAL EVOLUTION OF SUMRALL DISTRICT

The Sumrall school antedated the town by several years. Before there was a town, the scattered farmers of the vicinity felt the need of a school where their children might receive instruction, and in 1900 such a school was opened in a one-room country Baptist church, with M. P. Bynum as the first teacher. Several years later the school was moved to the hill on Highway Number 42 where D. C. Odom's service station now stands, just beyond the southern limits of the present town of Sumrall. It was variously known as "Brown High School" and "Bay Springs School."¹

When the mill was established the town grew rapidly. The school was transferred from the church to one of the company houses, W. L. Scott being the teacher. In a few years the town built a frame school building, which burned soon after it was built. It was replaced by a brick building, which also burned. Then the three-story brick building in which the high school is now housed was erected,

¹ Easterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall,"
op. cit.

being used first in the session of 1914-15.² The average attendance gradually increased from 250 in 1914 to about four hundred in 1930.³ There were seven teachers in 1914 and thirteen in 1930.

At first the school was an eleven-grade school, but in the early twenties it became a twelve-grade school. The course of study for the high school during this period was first year algebra, second year algebra, plane geometry, solid geometry, civics, ancient history, modern history, English, Latin, Spanish, French, and general science. This was a straight academic course, designed to prepare pupils to enter college. Two years of home economics was the only vocational course offered. Instruction in piano was also given. The sixteen required units had to be passed by a pupil before graduation.⁴ Since no electives were given, many pupils failed to pass the required sixteen units, and, therefore, failed to graduate.

During this time the school was a municipal separate school district, with added territory, under the management of five trustees appointed by the mayor and board of aldermen. As the available timber in the territory was

²Ibid.

³Minutes of the Board of Trustees, Sumrall Municipal Separate School District, Sumrall, Mississippi, May 2, 1930.

⁴Ibid.

exhausted, far-sighted citizens saw that the J. J. Newman Lumber Company was approaching the end of its run. They knew that after the mill left, the assessed valuation of the property would drop so low that there would not be enough funds to maintain a high school that would be in keeping with the size of the town. The subject of changing from a separate school district to a special consolidated district with a view to consolidating with schools in the vicinity that were facing a similar situation was broached. The trustees of the Sumrall Municipal Separate School District, however, had become accustomed to complete control of the affairs of the school and were, therefore, bitterly opposed to vesting in any county superintendent the authority of appointing the trustees. They preferred to sacrifice the possibilities of the organization of a special consolidated school at Sumrall and preserve their independence. In this they were supported by a majority of the citizens of the town.⁵

Rural schools in the vicinity of Sumrall were facing a bad financial situation as the twenties drew to a close. Conditions were pretty much the same in many parts of the State and in 1929-1930 the State Department of

⁵Personal Interview, R. R. Hudson, Sumrall, Mississippi.

Education in Mississippi required surveys to be made in several counties in the state for the purpose of establishing special consolidated schools. The survey of Lamar County resulted in a recommendation that a special consolidated school be located at Rocky Branch, with the high-school pupils being transported to Rocky Branch from Oloh and Hickory Grove.⁶ Rocky Branch was chosen as the location for the school because, of the three towns in Lamar County, two were separate municipal school districts--Sumrall and Lumberton--while the third, Purvis, had an agricultural high school.

The Oloh community had approximately 225 educable children;⁷ Rocky Branch had approximately 220;⁸ and Hickory Grove had approximately 500.⁹ The situation was typical of that found where communities are located close together.

⁶Report of Lamar County Survey to State Department of Education, 1929-1930, State Department of Education, Jackson, Mississippi.

⁷Records, County Superintendent of Education Lamar County, Purvis, Mississippi, 1929-1930.

⁸Ibid.
Records, County Superintendent of Education Marion County, Columbia, Mississippi, 1929-1930.

⁹Ibid.
Records, County Superintendent of Education Jefferson Davis County, Prentiss, Mississippi, 1929-1930.

There existed a spirit of rivalry and jealousy among them. Both Oloh and Hickory Grove would have used drastic measures rather than have their high schools discontinued and that of Rocky Branch expanded. The school buildings in each community served as the most central gathering places for social activities. Each community had great pride in its school building; for the people had erected large brick buildings, had beautified the grounds, and had accomplished so much in the way of school advancement that it seemed to the patrons that all their efforts would have been fruitless had their high school been transferred elsewhere.

In spite of the above conditions and opinions, Oloh agreed to let her high-school pupils be transferred to Rocky Branch for a one-year trial period. It was agreed that, at the end of the year, if the high-school pupils and their parents of Oloh were not satisfied with arrangements at Rocky Branch High School, they would be at liberty to resume high-school work in their own school at Oloh. If they liked to go to Rocky Branch they would join in forming a special consolidated school there. This special arrangement was made for one year by trustees of Oloh, the trustees of Rocky Branch, and the Lamar County Superintendent of Education.¹⁰

¹⁰

Records in the office of Lamar County Superintendent of Education, Purvis, Mississippi, 1929-1930.

The trial resulted in failure to consolidate. The Oloh people were convinced that they did not want to give up their high school and consolidate with Rocky Branch. They felt that Rocky Branch--even though it were converted into a special consolidated school--could not offer any better advantages than they could get at their own school.¹¹

When the mill was closed in 1931 what had been anticipated became a reality. Property valuation fell and the town's revenues with it.¹² In 1928-29 grammar-school teachers had been paid an average salary of one hundred dollars per month; high-school teachers were paid an average of one hundred and twenty-five dollars per month.¹³ The following year these salaries dropped to less than half what they had been.¹⁴ The situation was becoming acute; so in 1931, three years after the year's trial of consolidating the Oloh and Rocky Branch Schools, a second

¹¹
Ibid.

¹² Easterling, Dora Lee, "A History of Sumrall,"
op. cit. Minutes of Aldermen Sumrall, Mississippi,
1931.

Assessment Rolls, Sumrall, Mississippi, 1931.

¹³ Minutes Board of Trustees Sumrall Municipal
Separate School District, 1928-29, Sumrall, Mississippi.

¹⁴
Ibid., 1930-31.

approach was made to the board of trustees on the subject of abolishing the municipal separate school district for the purpose of sponsoring the organization of a special consolidated school district. In addition to the mill's closing, the following arguments were presented in support of the movement:

(1) Since Rocky Branch had failed to get a special consolidated school, there was a possibility of Sumrall's getting Oloh, Rocky Branch, and Hickory Grove to join with it in organizing a special consolidated school district, having the high school at Sumrall.

(2) Practically the whole population of Sumrall and the near vicinity depended directly upon the saw mill for its support. Since the mill was at the end of its run, the people would have to depend largely upon agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, there was a definite need for vocational agriculture, vocational home economics and their related subjects to be included in the curriculum. But as this enlargement of the curriculum appeared impossible under the present school system, it seemed that the only chance for adding these much needed subjects was to organize a special consolidated school system.

The Board agreed to sponsor two petitions, one to require the abolition of the separate school district and

a second to establish a special consolidated school.¹⁵
 The petition required to abolish the separate school district was circulated and a two-thirds majority of the patrons signed it; then it was presented to the mayor and board of aldermen who abolished the separate school district.

Any separate school district may be discontinued or abolished by the county school board if the school be a rural separate school district, or by the mayor and board of aldermen, if the school be a municipal separate school district, upon presentation of a petition seeking such action, signed by a two-thirds majority of the patrons of said separate school district; provided, however, that when such school district is discontinued or abolished it shall not impair or in any wise release the property of persons in such discontinued or abolished district from assessment and liability for payment of the debts and obligations of such districts.¹⁶

At the same time a petition was circulated to abolish the separate school district, another was circulated to establish a special consolidated school. Both petitions were carried by the same person at the same time for signatures. Before either of these was presented to any board for further action, a petition was circulated

¹⁵ Minutes, Board of Trustees, Sumrall Municipal Separate School District, 1930-1931, Sumrall, Mississippi.

¹⁶ Mississippi Code 1930, p. 2697, 6660, 1926 ch. 283.

at Oloh and one at Rocky Branch for the purpose of establishing a special consolidated school district to be comprised of the Oloh Consolidated School district, the Rocky Branch Consolidated School district, and the Sumrall Separate School district. In Sumrall Separate School district there was not a signer against the petitions; neither was there any opposition in the Oloh Consolidated School district; but in the Rocky Branch School district there were thirty-three for special consolidation and twenty-seven against it.

These petitions to establish a special consolidated school district were presented to the county school boards of Lamar, Covington, and Marion Counties, because the school attendance area involved lay in these three counties. The county school boards of these three counties created a special consolidated school district designating a grammar school at Oloh, another at Rocky Branch, and a third at Sumrall. A centralized high school at Sumrall was designated by the boards.¹⁷

On petition signed by a majority of the qualified electors of each of two or more consolidated schools or parts of consolidated school districts, the county school board in its discretion may form a special consolidated

¹⁷ Records, County Superintendent of Education, Lamar County, Purvis, Mississippi, 1931-1932.

school district, provided said district meets the requirements contained in this act. It shall be the duty of the county school board to determine and to describe the boundaries thereof as specified in Section 3 of this act.¹⁸

The Superintendent of Education of Lamar County, T. L. Williamson, appointed the following men to serve as the first board of trustees of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District: Dr. W. C. Cowart, president, Dr. J. S. Adams, secretary; Dr. J. R. Anderson, S. E. Watts and Lewis Beasley.¹⁹ The County Superintendents of Marion and Covington Counties were Calvin Broome and Oscar Cole respectively. After the first session of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School which was held in 1931-1932, a few of the far-sighted citizens of the Hickory Grove Consolidated School district saw that after the timber was cut from the land comprising said district, there would not be enough revenue with which to continue operating the grammar school and the four-year high school. Several of the most progressive school men of that community, after consulting the Superintendent and board of trustees of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, circulated a

¹⁸ Records, School Laws of the State of Mississippi, 1928, Section 4.

¹⁹ Records, County Superintendent of Education, Lamar County, loc. cit.

petition to annex the Hickory Grove Consolidated School territory to the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District. There was a group of patrons in the Hickory Grove community bitterly opposed to having their school brought into the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district for two reasons: (1) they did not like the idea of giving up their high school, and (2) they were afraid their taxes would be greatly increased. This group did all in their power to defeat the petition. The Hickory Grove Consolidated School was a line school having parts of its territory in Marion, Lamar, and Jefferson Davis Counties. Those in Hickory Grove Consolidated School District who were living in Jefferson Davis County wished to go to Bassfield because it is in Jefferson Davis County. Those who were circulating the petition for Hickory Grove School to be annexed to, and become a part of, the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district made an agreement with those who lived in the Hickory Grove district and were living in Jefferson Davis County that if they would sign the petition for Hickory Grove School to come into the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district, that the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district would release them so that they might go to Bassfield. Three identical petitions were drawn up, one for Lamar County, one for Marion County, and

one for Jefferson Davis County. Each person who signed a petition signed the one which was drawn up for his particular county. After the petitions had been circulated, each petition was carried to the county school board of the appropriate county. These three separate county school boards met in their respective county seats on the same date and canvassed the petitions. The result was that out of 287 qualified electors 144 signed the petition for joining Sumrall Special Consolidated School district leaving 143 against special consolidation.²¹ On this same date the county school boards of Covington, Lamar and Marion Counties canvassed petitions asking that Hickory Grove School district be consolidated with the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District. The result of these petitions was that the Hickory Grove School district was allowed to consolidate with the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district.²²

²¹Records, Superintendent of Education Lamar County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Marion County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Jefferson Davis County, loc. cit., 1932.

²²Records, Superintendent of Education Lamar County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Marion County, loc. cit.

Records, Superintendent of Education Covington County, Collins, Mississippi.

On the same date and at the same sitting the county school boards of Covington, Lamar, Marion, and Jefferson Davis Counties voted that residents of Jefferson Davis County who lived in the Hickory Grove School district might be released from the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district and be permitted to attend Bassfield School, in Jefferson Davis County.²³ The Hickory Grove School became a part of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district beginning with the 1932-1933 session.²⁴

The reason the county school boards in the four separate counties involved were able to transact so much business at one sitting was that the writer of this thesis stayed at a telephone and kept in constant touch with these boards during the day's session.

Since the establishment of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School district in 1931-1932, the schools of the district have continued to expand their services to the

²³ Records, Superintendent of Education Lamar County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Marion County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Jefferson Davis County, loc. cit., 1932.

Records, Superintendent of Education Covington County, loc. cit., 1932.

²⁴ Minutes Board of Trustees Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, 1932-33, loc. cit.

communities. A larger and more stable teaching force has been maintained, the curriculum has been expanded steadily, many extra-curricular activities have been added, and library facilities have been greatly increased.

TABLE I
1930-1931

Subject	Credit	9th Grade % of Failures	10th Grade % of Failures	11th Grade % of Failures	12th Grade % of Failures
9th English	1	10%			
10th English	1		10%		
11th English	1			6%	
12th English	1				2%
1st Yr. Alg.	1	8%			
2nd Yr. Alg.	1		5%		
Plane Geometry	1		8%		
Solid Geometry	$\frac{1}{2}$				
Higher Arith.	$\frac{1}{2}$		4%		
Ancient History	1		3%	1%	
Modern History	1				2%
1st Yr. French	1			16%	
2nd Yr. French	1				2%
Gen. Science	1	4%			
1st Yr. Latin	1	12%			
2nd Yr. Latin	1		6%		
1st Home Ec.	1	2.2%			
2nd Home Ec.	1				

TABLE I (Continued)

Subject	Credit	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
		% of Failures	% of Failures	% of Failures	% of Failures
Spelling		6%			
Civics	1	4%			

The above table gives the percentage of failures in the subjects offered before special consolidation. The girls were required to complete two years of home economics, therefore, they could leave off certain other subjects amounting to two units. The boys, however, had to take every subject offered except home economics, therefore, the boys had no electives.

TABLE II
1938-1939

Subject	Credit	9th Grade % of Failures	10th Grade % of Failures	11th Grade % of Failures	12th Grade % of Failures
9th English	1	12%			
10th English	1		6%		
11th English	1			4%	
12th English	1				1%
Speech Arts	1		2%	1%	
1st Yr. Alg.	1	13%			
2nd Yr. Alg.	1				
Plane Geometry	1		1%		
Bus. Arithmetic	1		2%		
Civics	1	2%			
World History	1		2%		
American History	1			3%	
Economics Government	1			2.2%	
1st Home Ec.	1	2%			
2nd Home Ec.	1				
3rd Home Ec.	1				
1st Agric.	1	1%	1%		
2nd Agric.	1				
3rd Agric.	1				

TABLE II (Continued)

Subject	Credit	9th Grade % of Failures	10th Grade % of Failures	11th Grade % of Failures	12th Grade % of Failures
Gen. Science	1	3.1%			
Biology	1		3%		
Health Geography	1	2%	1%	.5%	
Prob. of Dem.	1		2%	1%	
Occupational Guidance	1	5%			
Bookkeeping	1			.5%	
1st Shorthand	1		2%	3%	1%
2nd Shorthand	1				1%
Typing	1			1%	1%
Piano	$\frac{1}{2}$		1%		
Glee Club	$\frac{1}{2}$			1%	
Band	$\frac{1}{2}$	1%			

In order to formulate the above table, as well as Table No. 1, the enrolment of each class was taken; then the number of failures was checked and the percentage of failures worked out. In comparing the percentage of failures in Table No. 1, which shows results before special consolidation, with the percentage of failures in Table No. II, which shows the results after special consolidation, we find that in every instance except 9th English and 1st year algebra the percentage of failures was greater before special consolidation when the students did not have a wide range of electives.

TABLE III
GRADUATES OF SUMRALL SPECIAL CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL

	Sumrall	Victory	Oloh	Rocky Branch	Hickory Grove	Total
1932	21		2	2	3	28
1933	22		3	2	2	29
1934	14		1	0	5	20
1935	22		2	1	3	28
1936	22		2	2	4	30
1937	22	7	2	3	2	36
1938	21	4	2	4	5	36
1939	19	4	2	4	5	34
Total	163	15	16	18	29	241

This table shows the number of graduates from each community for all the years from time of special consolidation to the present date. Victory high school students have come to Sumrall for the past three years. Each student from Victory pays a tuition of one dollar and fifty cents per month.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS OF THE FORMATION OF THE SUMRALL SPECIAL
CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The most tangible result of the formation of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District was the maintenance of an adequate approved high school in a district which would otherwise have had none. Other results have become discernible with the passage of the years. The school program has been enlarged; the percentage of failures has decreased; the percentage of graduates has increased; there has been a decrease in the cost of instruction; and the school tax rate has been lowered.

The school program has been considerably enlarged. As was noted in Chapter III, prior to special consolidation the school curriculum comprised a straight academic course as shown on page 13. Since special consolidation the curriculum has been gradually expanded so that it now embraces some thirty-three subjects, including, in addition to the regular academic courses, vocational and cultural subjects.¹ Commercial work, including one unit in

¹Records, Superintendent Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, Sumrall, Mississippi.

bookkeeping, one in typing, and two in shorthand, has been added. This work is open to high school pupils residing in the district and to a limited number of outsiders.²

Vocational agriculture has been added to the curriculum. Two agriculturists are employed for the full twelve months. They teach agriculture and manual training in the school and teach adult classes throughout the district.

Before special consolidation, the high school course of study contained only two years of vocational home economics, with one teacher employed for the length of the regular school term. Since special consolidation three years of vocational home economics have been offered; and two teachers of home economics are employed--one for eight months, the other for twelve months.³

The music department has grown to include not only piano but also instruction in band instruments, a band, dancing, a glee club, and a rythm band.⁴

The library facilities have expanded with the curriculum since special consolidation. At regular intervals

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

the books from the grammar school libraries are exchanged. In this way each grammar school has the use of all the books in all four libraries during the session.⁵

The Sumrall Special Consolidated School has sponsored and encouraged pupil activities. At various times the pupils have participated in school government, worked up home-room projects, conducted programs at school assemblies, organized school clubs, published school papers, presented plays and recitals and participated in physical activities.⁶

Since the formation of the special school district, Sumrall has won distinctive honors in athletics. The boys' basketball team has won four state championships, in 1933, 1936, 1937, and 1938; it also won regional championship honors in 1932, 1933, 1936, 1937 and 1940.⁷ The girls also play basketball. Both boys and girls participate in other forms of physical development, such as football, baseball, soft ball, and other games. The grammar school at Sumrall has recently had about \$250 worth of playground

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Records, Mississippi Athletic and Literary Association, Jackson, Mississippi, 1932, 1933, 1936, 1937, and 1940.

equipment installed.⁸ The use of the equipment and directed out-of-door games affords the pupils in the elementary grades a change for physical development. Basketball is the main source of recreation and physical development in the other grammar schools of the district.⁹ Formerly Sumrall had done nothing outstanding in athletics; nor had there been any equipment with which to carry on a program in physical education.

The straight academic course (see Chapter III, page 13) which offered little or no elective work, resulted in many failures. This meant that many pupils failed to graduate. Hence a number of boys and girls dropped out of school, which probably would not have been the case had they been given a wider choice of subjects. Table 1, page 26, shows the percentage of failures in subjects offered before special consolidation. A comparison of these statistics with those found in Table II, page 28, which shows the percentage of failures since special consolidation, reveals the improvement which has been brought about. Only in English and algebra

⁸Records, Superintendent Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, loc. cit.

⁹Ibid.

for the ninth grade has the percentage of failures been greater since special consolidation. In all other instances, the percentage has been lowered. In formulating these tables the enrolment in each class was taken; then the number of failures was checked and the percentage of failures worked out. Undoubtedly, the broadened curriculum is not the sole cause for this improvement, but it has played an important part. Improvement in faculty and facilities has also been an important factor in lowering the percentage of failures in the schools. These latter factors, however, are results of the formation of the special consolidated district.

One of the advantages realized by the Sumrall Special Consolidated School since consolidation is the maintenance of a stable teaching force. Since the formation of the district, the board has followed the policy of permitting the superintendent to nominate the teachers. This, together with Mississippi's nepotism law, which forbids the employment in accredited schools of teachers related to board members in any degree closer than first cousins, has obviated petty politics in the selection of the faculty. The absence of such politics, together with the increase in salary and improved equipment has resulted in a relatively small turnover in teacher employment. The

average change since special consolidation has been five out of a faculty of thirty-nine. Before the formation of the district about seventy-five per cent of the teachers had had only three years' college training, or less. About twenty-five per cent had college degrees. With a faculty that has grown from thirteen to thirty-nine, about eighty per cent have college degrees and all but one of the others has had three years in college.¹⁰ The faculty keeps alert by enrolling in summer-school courses, attending conventions, and reading professional literature.

The cost of instruction per month, per child has been reduced since the merger of the schools into the special consolidated district. Formerly the cost of instruction for high school students in Sumrall was \$15.00 per month, per child.¹¹ In the Oloh, Rocky Branch, and Hickory Grove high schools the average cost per month per child was \$13.00.¹² The average cost for all the grammar schools was \$3.00 per month per child.¹³ Since special consolidation, the average cost per month per child in the high school is \$5.00;¹⁴

¹⁰ Minutes Board Trustees Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, loc. cit., April 25, 1940.

¹¹ Ibid., May 2, 1930.

¹² Ibid., May 2, 1930.

¹³ Ibid., May 2, 1930.

¹⁴ Ibid., April 25, 1940.

in the grammar schools it is \$2.50 per month per child.¹⁵
Table V, page 40, sets forth this data.

Before the special consolidated school was established at Sumrall, a tax of thirty-nine mills was levied for maintenance in the Sumrall School District;¹⁶ a similar tax of twenty-nine mills was assessed for the Oloh, Rocky Branch, and Hickory Grove districts. Since the centralization of the schools, the maintenance-tax rate has been eighteen mills throughout the district.¹⁸ Even though the taxes have been decreased, the enrolment has increased and the school curriculum has been enlarged.

Every effort has been toward making an institution that will serve the community interests and needs. Courses of study for adult classes in agriculture and home economics have been oriented toward this end. The lessons include lectures, discussions, mimeographed helps, demonstrations, and illustrative materials. Following are some of the ways in which the Sumrall Special Consolidated district has been benefited by adult classes:

¹⁵Ibid., April 25, 1940.

¹⁶Ibid., May 2, 1930.

¹⁷Ibid., May 2, 1930.

¹⁸Ibid., November 1, 1940.

1. People are permitted to improve their minds.
2. The citizens of the community are brought closer together while they work for an endeavor which is worthwhile.
3. The courses help to justify the capital outlay and current expenses of the school district.
4. Taxpayers of the community who have no children of school age are able to derive benefit from the school.
5. Better attitudes are built among those who are antagonistic or who have a negative attitude toward the school.
6. Adult and community interests are centered on worth-while tasks.

TABLE IV
TRANSPORTATION COST, MILEAGE, ENROLMENT, AND
AVERAGE LOAD FOR
SUMRALL SPECIAL CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL 1938-1939

Route Number	Cost per Month	Length of Route (in miles)	Enrolment	Average Load
1	\$61.50	6.5	50	46
2	59.00	6	36	33
3	59.50	7.75	56	53
4	95.00	15	75	70
5	67.00	12	50	45
6	70.00	7	40	35
7A & 10	69.50	11	52	46
8 & 9	80.00	22.5	65	60
7 & 11	77.50	21.5	61	54
12 & 13	68.50	9	52	49
14	59.00	7	45	41
15 & 16	108.00	18	70	65
17	60.00	8	40	35

The approximate average cost per child per month in average daily attendance for transportation is \$1.50.¹⁴ That of the State of Mississippi is \$2.10.¹⁵

¹⁴ Office of the County Superintendent of Education, Purvis, Miss.

¹⁵ Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Jackson, Miss.

TABLE V
COST OF INSTRUCTION OF PUPILS FROM SUMRALL,
OLOH, ROCKY BRANCH, AND HICKORY GROVE,
BEFORE AND AFTER SPECIAL CONSOLIDATION

	Before	After
Sumrall High School, cost per month per child	\$15.00	\$5.00
Oloh, Rocky Branch, and Hickory Grove High School, average cost per month per child	13.00	
Sumrall Grammar School, cost per month per child	3.00	2.50
Oloh, Rocky Branch, and Hickory Grove Grammar School, average cost per month per child	3.00	

The cost per month per child was higher before special consolidation because there was a smaller number of pupils in the classes. The fewer students in a class the greater the cost of instruction is per child.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since special consolidation has resulted in the maintenance of an approved high school in the communities embraced within the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District, it naturally follows that the first recommendation of the author is that the school should be continued. It should also continue to function as it does at present, with special emphasis on such vocational subjects as agriculture, home economics, and commerce. It is further recommended that the small schools at Victory and Clark Communities consolidate with the Sumrall system; that the school plants be improved; that the salaries of the teachers in the high schools and the grammar schools be increased; and that the present policy of maintaining schools which will best serve the community be expanded to include leisure-time activities.

The Victory and Clark Communities lie within the geographical area of the Sumrall Special Consolidated District. The high school pupils from these communities attend the district's high school at Sumrall on a tuition basis at the present time. Entrance into the Sumrall special district not only will eliminate the necessity for



tuition for the high-school pupils of these communities, but likewise will result in the establishment and maintenance of improved grammar schools, staffed by better-trained teachers.

At the present time, the district has the following physical plants (exclusive of teachers' homes): grammar school buildings at Sumrall, Hickory Grove, Rocky Branch, and Oloh, a high-school building and a vocational building at Sumrall. Generally speaking, the grammar schools are adequate for the time being, although an addition should be constructed to the buildings at Sumrall. There is need, however, for more modern high-school, vocational and recreational plants in Sumrall. The present high-school building was constructed in 1914¹ and the vocational-recreational building in 1931.² The high school building was renovated in 1938,³ but in many particulars it is outmoded and is not entirely adequate for the needs of the school.

Whenever feasible, an up-to-date, single-story building should be erected to house the high school, the said building to contain the most modern features and

¹Records in the Office of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School, Sumrall, Mississippi.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

equipment, including adequate library and laboratory facilities, a cafeteria, and an auditorium with an adequately equipped stage. A new vocational building should be constructed. It should contain all the space and equipment necessary for the agriculture, home economics, and commerce departments. Further, a complete physical education-recreation building should be erected. This building should embrace basketball courts, handball courts, gymnasium apparatus, swimming pool, game and recreation rooms and shower rooms and locker facilities for both boys and girls. Since the school system at the present time owns some thirty-five acres of land (including and adjoining the present high school campus) there is sufficient space for the construction of such a plant.

If, and when, these new buildings are erected, the present high school building should be devoted to a junior high school for the entire district. At the present time the school district maintains eight years of grammar school and four years of high school work. When the district-wide junior high school is instituted at Sumrall, it is suggested that a 6-3-3 plan be put into operation, with six years of grammar school work, three years of junior-high-school work, and three years of senior-high-school work.

Until the erection of an entirely new high school plant is practicable, the present high school building should be improved by the addition of new equipment. The Library should be moved out of the study hall, and the space occupied by the library at the present time should be utilized for study-hall purposes exclusively. New seats should be installed, particularly in the study hall. The study hall and class rooms should have adequate lighting facilities and window shades, and the library should be enlarged.

Teachers' salaries have been measurably increased from the level to which they had fallen prior to special consolidation (see page 17). At the present time, teachers in the grammar schools receive an average of eighty dollars per month, while the average salary of the teachers in the high school is one hundred dollars per month. Provision is made for teachers to receive pay for time lost because of illness. The superintendent has been fortunate in maintaining a well-trained faculty (see page 36) at the present rate, a fact partially due, perhaps, to general economic conditions throughout the country. It is recommended that the salary scale for all teachers be increased. To encourage further study on the part of the teachers, the superintendent has been able to secure a higher salary base for teachers holding higher degrees. This practice should be continued.

As was stated in Chapter IV (see page 37) every effort has been made toward the erection of an institution that will serve the community interest and needs. This general policy should not only be continued, but accelerated. A good school cannot perform its functions without taking into account not only its own school population, but that of the district as well.

As was stated in Evaluation Criteria:

The school exists primarily for the benefit of the boys and girls of the community which it serves. The type of people, their vocations and interests, their tendencies and prejudices, their abilities, their racial characteristics, their hopes and prospects regarding the future, their customs and habits, the similarities and differences of groups within any community are different from those of other communities. The school should know the distinctive characteristics and needs of the people of the school community, particularly those of the children. But every school community is inevitably inter-related with other communities and is part of larger communities, particularly the state and nation. The school, therefore should adapt its general philosophy and specific purpose to its own community and to the larger communities of which it is a part.⁴

The people of the Sumrall Special Consolidated School District are mainly of what is popularly called "Pioneer American stock." They are largely of British decent (English and Scotch-Irish) with a scattered

⁴Highsmith, J. Henry, "What is a Good High School," The High School Journal, vol. 22, no. 5, May, 1939.

sprinkling of Germans, Czechs, and Hungarians. Almost all are Evangelical Protestant in their religious belief. Most of them are unpretentious, hard-working farm folk. Those who do not farm cater to the wants and needs of those who do, and are themselves, almost without exception, the descendants of farm folk. It has been said that the rural Mississippian places his hopes "in next year's crop and the Democratic Party,"⁵ which means that he is an agrarian. Most of the boys and girls of the Sumrall district remain on the farm though such nearby industrial communities as Hattiesburg, Laurel, and Columbia, Mississippi, and Bogalusa and Baton Rouge, Louisiana, attract some. The order of events for boys and girls of this district may be summed up in these words from Rural Youth:

The normal sequence for American boys is school, employment, marriage, and a new family. The sequence for girls is similar except that employment is not a necessary requisite to marriage.⁶

As Paul W. Chapman says:

There is a close relationship between preparation for work and occupational success.⁷

⁵Mississippi, A Guide to the Magnolia State, loc. cit.

⁶Melvin, Bruce L. and Smith, Elvia N., Rural Youth, Their Situation and Prospects, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office), p. 71.

⁷Chapman, Paul W., Occupational Guidance, (Atlanta, Turner E. Smith & Co., 1937), p. 577.

Therefore, in order to serve best the needs of the people of the district, the Sumrall Special Consolidated School should continue its policy of stressing vocational education, and since vocational education is general education plus specific training,⁸ even greater emphasis should be placed upon the idea of general educational subjects plus training in agriculture, home economics, and commerce.

The school's duty to the youth of its community does not stop with education and training for jobs. Provision must be made for leisure time. The pleasures of youth in the past have been closely associated with the family, the church, and the school, but improvements in transportation and communications have begun to work a change. The rural communities of the district are no longer closed units. Their boundaries have been broken; their institutions and organizations have changed. Along with the changes has come a growing belief in the value of recreation as a whole, although, as is true generally in rural communities, recognition of the need of leisure-time activities has been slow. The schools of the district can, and should, play an ever-increasing role in the leisure-time activities of the young

⁸
Ibid., p. 577.

people of the communities. This can be accomplished through the music, speech arts, and athletic departments as well as through supervised school social functions.

The high school at Sumrall inaugurated a band during the 1939-40 session. This band should be further encouraged and its facilities expanded. A chorus, or glee club, should be organized and maintained and group singing on the part of the pupils should be instituted. A rythm band functions in the grammar school at Sumrall; provision for similar organizations in the other elementary schools of the district would doubtless increase the interest in music throughout the district. This entire program should stress the pleasure and relaxation to be gained from participation in music.

The department of speech arts should not only continue its program of choric reading, but should make it more inclusive. The Dramatic Club should be encouraged and should be given a minimum amount of necessary equipment with which to work in order to present a representative program of plays, pageants, or other forms of dramatic entertainment. As with the music program, such activities should be conducted mainly for their recreational value. The cultural values should be concomitants.

In Sumrall, as in most schools, the athletic department is the major center of the leisure-time pleasures of the students, and basketball is the principal sport.

Most of the boys and many of the girls in the schools-- particularly in the high school--play basketball throughout the school year. However, a comprehensive, organized, intra-mural athletic and supervised-play program should be put into effect so that the entire personnel of the schools may benefit from the athletic program.

Concerning preparing students for better living after school days, it has been said:

It is not enough for a student to acquire a store of learning, a quickened imagination, a deepened appreciation of the treasures of art. Ideals of personal conduct must be elevated and strengthened, the will must be tried and tempered, bodily health must be preserved and developed, healthful habits must be cultivated and established--the whole man must be co-ordinated and disciplined. There must be provision for wise relaxation and play.⁹

In an investigation of the relationship between grades of intelligence and participation in athletics, Mr. J. P. Montgomery found a fairly high correlation between intelligence and athletic ability. He states:

Mr. C. H. Bean made an investigation pertaining to job analyzing athletics. From ninety-two replies of widely known athletic directors and coaches, he found that sixty-seven mentioned intelligence as one of the requisites for athletic success, of whom sixty-three made it the prime essential. Fifty-five included character, forty-three determination, forty-two quickness and strength, and thirty-nine physical strength. He mentioned that nearly every reply asserted that no other field

⁹ Highsmith, J. Henry, "What is a good High School,"
op. cit.

of education makes such insistent demands as does athletics upon the manly virtues as suppression of anger, control of appetites, fairness and endurance of defeats without abating the zeal for achievements.¹⁰

For these reasons the athletic program throughout the Sumrall Special Consolidated District should be expanded so as to include all the students, thus bringing to all the opportunity for developing a quickened imagination, broad interest, high ideals of personal conduct, an easy grace of body, and a vitality to pursue desired ends as well as the pleasure and relaxation attendant upon such a program.

10

Montgomery, J. P., "An Investigation of the Relation Between Grades of Intelligence and Success in Athletics," Unpublished Masters Thesis, Louisiana State University, University, Louisiana, p. 15.

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Consultant

Dr. J. R. Anderson, Sumrall, Mississippi (Local practitioner for thirty-five years and president of school board).

R. R. Hudson, Sumrall, Mississippi (Planter).

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BIOGRAPHY

Roscoe Odas Stringer was born August 19, 1899, in Jones County, Mississippi. He received his elementary and secondary education in the county of his birth, and was graduated from the Jones County Agricultural High School in 1921. In the fall of that same year he entered Mississippi College at Clinton, Mississippi, from which he was awarded the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1924.

Having fulfilled the requirements for his degree in three years, he held the position of assistant principal and coach in the high school at Flora, Mississippi, during the session of 1924-1925.

From Flora, he transferred in the fall of 1925 to assume the position of principal and coach in the high school at Sumrall, Mississippi. This position he held two years. He was promoted to the position of superintendent of the Sumrall School system, which he has continually filled subsequently.

He was married June 12, 1926, to Miss Iva Flora Lovett of Moselle, Mississippi.

He did graduate work in the University of Missouri in the summer of 1936. In the summer of 1938 he took an extension course from the Louisiana State University,

where he did residence work during the summer of 1939 and on Saturdays during the session of 1939-1940. He is now a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts. This thesis is written in partial fulfilment of the requirements.

EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: **Roscoe Odas Stringer**

Major Field: **Education**

Title of Thesis: **A Study of the Growth and Development of the
Sumrall Special Consolidated School District**

Approved:

W. H. Miller

Major Professor and Chairman

Charles W. Dyer

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

J. M. Mason

Homer L. Garrett

Date of Examination:

July 18, 1940